

THE CASE OF LADY LUKESTAN*

By MISS L. GALBRAITH

Coeval with the existence of mankind has existed the belief in ghosts. Like other cults, it has had its ups and downs, its periods of exultation and of persecution.

It has received the sanction of the priesthood and attained the dignity of a special office in the Book of Common Prayer. It has been lashed by the scorn of the materialist, and derided by professors of exact Science. Advancing education stripped it to the skeleton as Superstition, and Advanced Thought has reclothed it with the nebulous draperies of Esoteric Philosophy.

The swing of the pendulum and the exertions of the Society for Psychical Research have improved the position of the ghost, but its rights as a citizen have yet to be established. The State recognizes it not. Legally a ghost labors under greater disadvantages than a Catholic before the passing of the Emancipation Bill. It cannot make a will or bring an action at law. It may not, whatever its qualifications during life, celebrate a marriage or give a certificate of death. No judge on the bench would convict on the evidence of a ghost, though, could subpoenas be served on the spirit world, some had escaped the gallows and many died publicly on the scaffold, instead of decently in their beds.

Rightly or wrongly, however, the law takes no cognizance of ghosts, and ghosts would seem to be aware of this and occasionally act with the irresponsibility of those who cannot be called to account.

Legally a ghost has no existence. This point was established in the case of "*Lukestan vs. Lukestan and others.*"

The trial, as may be remembered (it was very inadequately reported in the daily papers), involved the succession to the Earldom of Marylebone (1776 G. B.). Mr. Baron Collings, before whom the case was tried, ruled there was no evidence of a legal marriage between the late Lord Lukestan and Miss Parmela Ardilaun, that the entry of the said mar-

*A strange story and a ghostly appearance. The American Copyright by Short Stories.

riage in the parish register was a forgery, and he directed the jury to give their verdict for the defendants, with costs.

I do not pretend to criticise the learned judge's attitude in the matter, though it was apparent from the first that his "summing-up" was dead against the plaintiff. I merely place before such of the public as may be interested therein the exact facts of one of the most singular cases ever heard in a court of law, and the public, which is always intelligent (is not *vox populi vox Dei* an all but universally accepted axiom to-day?), may judge for itself whether Lady Lukestan, otherwise known as Miss Ardilaun, was entitled to the sympathy due to a deeply injured woman, or the contumely which is justly heaped on the head of an unsuccessful adventuress.

Morally, Miss Ardilaun was not entirely innocent. She undoubtedly played with the feelings of a nervous and hypersensitive man. Other women have done the same without any very serious result. The mistake in Miss Ardilaun's case was, that she did not take the trouble to study the mechanism of her plaything. The truth is that years of over-work, enforced solitude, and rigorous self-repression had reduced the Rev. Cyprian Martyn to a condition of mind closely bordering on insanity, and in this condition he construed an ordinary flirtation into a cardinal sin.

He believed that in falling in love with Miss Ardilaun and acquainting her with the fact, he had broken his faith with God and man, and incurred the curse pronounced on those who, "having put their hand to the plough, turn back."

In a moment of delirium he told the girl that his choice lay between the Creator and the creature—between Good and evil—and that he had deliberately, and with his eyes open, chosen the latter; that he was prepared to risk all penalties here and pains hereafter for the gratification of his passion; and as he had proved himself unworthy of the high office of the priesthood, he would resign his cure, marry her, and claim the privileges he had purchased at the price of his very soul.

It is at all times dangerous to disclose the inmost workings of the heart to a woman, who rarely comprehends, and can never realize, the length, breadth, and depth of a man's passion, and this mad avowal was the seal of Cyprian Martyn's fate.

Miss Ardilaun probably resented the position assigned her by the terms of her lover's choice. She certainly thought him insane, and the event proved her to be absolutely correct. She very curtly stated that at no period of their very informal acquaintance had she reckoned on him as a factor in her future life. She had tolerated his attentions solely because she was bored to distraction in the rural solitude periodically insisted on by her aristocratic and tyrannical invalid aunt; and as to her marriage the only part he could possibly take in the ceremony would be that of marrying her to another man, for she should never dream for a moment of marrying him. With this rather cruel speech, Miss Ardilaun would have parted from her clerical admirer, but before she could realize his intention, Martyn had caught her in his arms and kissed her passionately full on the mouth. "You have ruined me body and soul," he said, when at last he released her; "but remember, I *shall* marry you, if not to myself, then to another man. Living or dying I will have my revenge."

This was his farewell. A week later he was found dead in his study, with an empty bottle, which had contained morphia, lying on the table at his side.

That the unhappy man had deliberately taken his own life was beyond a doubt. All his affairs had been set in order, his liabilities paid, and his correspondence and diaries destroyed. He had written to his brother and only near surviving relative, requesting him to receive all such goods as he might die possessed of, and begging him to carry out certain directions as to the disposal of his body.

This letter, which was produced at the inquest, also referred to some unpardonable sin committed by the writer, which rendered him unfit for prolonged existence. As the dead man had borne the most exemplary character, and was universally respected, this allusion was generally regarded as a symptom of mental derangement.

The local practitioner stated in evidence that the deceased had consulted him professionally before starting on his annual holiday. He was then in a very low, nervous state, and complained of depression and insomnia. He (the medical man) attributed his condition to over-work and insufficient nourishment. Mr. Martyn was a strict Anglican, and

held extreme views on matters of self-discipline. Hallucination as to the commission of some unpardonable sin was a common and painful feature in cases of religious mania, from which, in his (Dr. Garrod's) opinion, the deceased was undoubtedly suffering at the time of his death.

The jury brought in a verdict of "Suicide whilst of unsound mind," and the unfortunate man was buried in the shadow of the village church which for ten dreary years had been the scene of his ministrations.

All this happened in the Autumn of 1886. During the following Winter I made the acquaintance of Miss Ardilaun at a crowded "At Home" given by the wife of a legal luminary of the first magnitude. She was kind enough to give me a dance, and inquired if I knew many people. I confessed I was practically a stranger, brought by my cousin and chum, Charley Roskill, who, as a dancing man and a rising "junior" was a *persona gratissima* with his hostess.

I think it was then Miss Ardilaun owned to being tired and suggested that, as the rooms were hot and overcrowded (which was certainly true), we should find a seat outside, and she selected one immediately opposite the stairs.

Our conversation turned chiefly on Roskill, in whom my companion appeared to take more than a little interest. She said Sir Charles had spoken of him as an Attorney-General of the future, and she asked what struck me as rather a singular question.

"Is he," she said, "the sort of man to whom you would advise a woman to go if she were in urgent need of assistance and advice?"

I replied, "I was convinced that Roskill, like myself, would at any time be ready to place his entire professional resources at Miss Ardilaun's service, and that he was undoubtedly clever."

She laughed a little. "I wasn't sure," she said, "but you ought to know."

Then she went away on the arm of a young man, who had arrived to claim his partner.

It was Lord Lukestan. I saw them several times in the course of the evening, always sitting out in sheltered corners, and engaged in earnest conversation. Lukestan was a good-looking boy, a year or two Miss Ardilaun's junior, and

it struck me that she accepted his manifest admiration in a serious manner, which indicated that she meant business.

I mentioned this to Roskill as we walked home together, and he laughed the suggestion to scorn. Lukestan's people would never permit such a match. It was well known that old Lord Marylebone destined his nephew for his cousin, Lady Adeliza Skelton. It was quite possible that the boy himself might prefer Miss Ardilaun as a bride-elect, but he could not afford to run counter to his uncle's wishes. He was dependent on his prospects as Lord Marylebone's heir, and more than half the property was unentailed.

"Besides," he concluded, "the girl hasn't a penny. She is virtually the companion and white slave of her aunt, old Lady Catermaran. Take my word, its only a common or garden flirtation, and it won't last long at that."

Roskill speaks with authority on social matters. and I let the subject drop, but somehow I wasn't convinced.

People talked a good deal about Miss Ardilaun that winter, but with the new season interest in her seemed to die down. She was seldom seen, and I heard, through Roskill, that she was devoting herself entirely to her aunt, who had become a confirmed invalid, and went nowhere. It seemed a dreary life for a young and beautiful woman, and I wondered whether Lord Lukestan's engagement to his cousin, which had been formally announced in all the society papers, had anything to do with the girl's sudden retirement from the world.

In June Lord Marylebone died. For the past six months he had been hovering on the brink of the grave, and no one had expected him to last so long. He was, from all accounts, a very disagreeable old gentleman, and I should doubt if any of his relatives, even including his only daughter, much regretted his removal to another sphere.

Lukestan attended the funeral as chief mourner, and was present at the subsequent reading of the will. There were a few legacies to servants and dependents, and a suitable provision for Lady Adeliza. The bulk of the property went with the title.

Lukestan was now Lord Marylebone, and a free agent, but the dead man's shoes, for which he had waited, were destined to be fitted on a dead man. He left Marylebone Castle for

town on the evening of the funeral, an evening made memorable by the occurrence of the worst railway disaster of recent years. The night mail from the North collided with a goods train a little beyond Settringham Junction, and while the confusion and dismay, incidental to such a misfortune, were at their height, the Lowton and Wolds express dashed into the rear of the wrecked passenger train, and completed a scene of horror rarely equalled in the annals of travel.

The daily papers chronicled in full the ghastly details of the catastrophe. The boiler of the express engine burst within a few minutes of the second collision, and steam and fire alike wreaked their fury on the unhappy passengers imprisoned in the overturned carriages. First on the long list of victims, published by the evening press, was the name of Lord Lukestan.

The compartment which had been reserved for his use was reduced to matchwood, and it was only after immense exertions on the part of the officials that the bodies of the young man and his valet could be removed from the mass of smoking *débris*.

"Poor fellow!" said Roskill, as he put down the paper. "His luck has come too late. I wonder"—he paused to light his cigarette over the lamp—"how Miss Ardilaun will take it?"

We had dined early, preparatory to looking in at the Frivolity, but somehow the smash on the Great Northern had taken the edge off our interest in the new burlesque. Roskill's acquaintance with Lukestan had been of the slightest; to me he was hardly more than a name, but the tragic circumstances attending his death evoked a sympathy that was almost personal.

"I wonder," Charley repeated, meditatively, "how Miss Ardilaun will take it?"

The words were barely past his lips when the servant appeared with a message.

"Lady to see you, sir. She wouldn't give her name, but I was to say her business was most urgent."

She must have followed close on Steven's heels, for before he had finished speaking she was in the room. A tall, slender woman, wrapped from head to foot in a long cloak of softly rustling silk. She wore a thick veil, but even under this dis-

guise I was struck by something familiar in her gait and carriage.

The moment the door had closed upon the retreating man, she lifted the thick folds of black gauze. It was Miss Ardilaun. Her eyes were red with weeping, and her face as white as a sheet.

"I hope you will forgive me for disturbing you at this hour," she said, going straight to Charley, "but I knew you lived in chambers, and I wanted to find you at home. I am in great trouble, Mr. Roskill, dreadful trouble, and I must have advice without delay. I thought—I felt sure you would help me."

If Roskill was surprised (and I think he was) he did not show it. He said simply, "I shall be glad to give you any assistance in my power, Miss Ardilaun," and looked at me.

She followed the direction of his eyes, and became aware, for the first time, of the presence of a third person. I intimated my readiness to withdraw, but she cut me short.

"Please don't go, Mr. Bryant. I am not sure that I don't require a solicitor's rather than counsel's opinion—at present. In any case you may as well hear my story—if you do not mind."

I was only too glad of the opportunity, for I own my curiosity was a good deal excited. We sat down and waited.

Miss Ardilaun's manner was that of a woman who has nerved herself to go through anything. She was unnaturally, almost horribly calm. She began without any hesitation, speaking in a dry, metallic tone, which was devoid of the least trace of emotion.

"You have seen in the papers that Lord Lukestan was killed last night in the railway accident? I had better tell you at once that he was my husband. We were married last January. There were strong reasons for keeping the marriage secret. Lord Lukestan was entirely dependent on his uncle, who had other views for him, and he dare not risk the consequences of openly disregarding those wishes. At that time Lord Marylebone was not expected to live more than a few weeks, and he (Arthur) felt sure that a private marriage would be the easiest way of extricating ourselves from the many family difficulties which surrounded us. We never anticipated the necessity for secrecy lasting so long. Of course

Lord Marylebone's partial recovery placed us in a most painful position, but we knew it could only be temporary, and we resolved to chance it and wait. That was why Lord Lukestan's engagement to his cousin was formally announced. What would have happened if the old earl had insisted on their immediate marriage I don't know; fortunately or unfortunately, he did not make a point of that, and when circumstances rendered it necessary that our marriage should be acknowledged, Lord Marylebone died. I cannot tell you how rejoiced I was to receive the news, and only last night I went down on my knees and thanked God for this."

She drew a telegram from her pocket and laid it on the table before us. The message had been handed in at Marfleet, the post town of Marylebone Castle, and ran—

"Thank Heaven, all right at last; am leaving by night mail. Shall be with you eleven to-morrow. Will see Craike on way. Arthur."

"I thought my prayers had been answered," she went on, in the same low, even voice, "that my troubles were over; but you see I was premature in my thanksgivings. To-day I am in the most horrible position in which any woman could be placed—a widow who has never been acknowledged as a wife. I have neither father nor mother. My aunt has never desired my confidence; she has always regarded me in the light of an unpaid servant, and even if I wished to do so, I could not consult her now, for the doctors inform me that in her present state of health any sudden shock might prove fatal. I have no other relations, no one to whom I can turn for help. I must make my marriage public. What am I to do?"

The first step was manifestly to procure the necessary proofs of the marriage. We said so and inquired whether she was provided with a copy of the certificate.

She replied she was quite certain that no such document had been given or demanded.

"I know nothing about the preliminary arrangements," she said. "I left them entirely to Lord Lukestan. I cannot even tell you the name of the village where we were married, though I should be able to find my way there. It is a tiny place, quite out of the world, about ten miles from Gar-

stang Junction. Parker, Lord Lukestan's confidential servant, met us there with a cart and we drove straight to the church. It stands above the village on the top of the hill. We were married by the vicar. I know his name—it is Martyn."

I referred to Crockford, and presently found "Martyn, Lucian John, Vicar of Slumber-le-Wold, Yorkshire."

"That is the man, I suppose. Was he a personal friend of your husband's?"

— "He was a stranger to both of us," she replied, emphatically.

I undertook to obtain a copy of the certificate and wrote the same night to the Rev. Lucian Martyn. To my utter dismay I received in reply a courteous note regretting his inability to comply with my request, as the marriage to which I referred had never been solemnized.

Mr. Martyn's letter reached me by the first post. Two hours later I presented myself at No. 20 Berkeley Square, asked for Miss Ardilaun and was shown into the library. In a few minutes she joined me, and I broke the news as gently as I could.

She seemed utterly overcome. "It is impossible," she repeated; "he cannot deny it. Beside, there are our signatures in the register. Surely he can be made to produce that."

"You are certain that Martyn is the right man?" I asked. "You could swear to his signing the register in that name?"

"No," she replied, "I never saw his signature. I wrote my own name and I saw Arthur write his. Then Parker witnessed our signatures. Mr. Martyn followed, but I did not see what he had written."

"You must excuse my asking questions, Lady Lukestan, where they are necessary. You mentioned that the clergyman who married you was a stranger to both you and your husband. How do you know that he was Mr. Martyn?"

She hesitated.

"I knew him from his likeness to his brother."

"You are acquainted with his brother, then?"

"I was. The subject is very painful to me. Mr. Cyprian

Martyn is dead. I believe he committed suicide, but our—our friendship had entirely ceased before that took place. I never corresponded with him, and our people were not aware of our acquaintance. It was merely an affair of a few weeks and terminated very abruptly."

"And the likeness between the brothers was so striking that you recognized Mr. Lucian Martyn immediately?"

"The likeness was more than striking, it was horrible"—she shivered—"if they were both living I should not have known them apart. I was aware that Cyprian Martyn had a brother, who was a vicar of a remote parish in Yorkshire, but until the last moment I did not know that he was to marry us. If I had heard the name sooner, I should have used every means in my power to prevent it."

"You are prepared to affirm on oath that your marriage was solemnized by Mr. Martyn in due form, and recorded in the parish register?"

She looked surprised at my question.

"Certainly I am. You surely do not doubt my word?"

"Not at all, but this is a very serious matter. Will you now tell me every detail connected with the ceremony?"

"As I said, I know nothing of the preliminary arrangements. During the third week in January, Lord Lukestan and I were both staying at Chilworth Priory. My aunt was also to have been of the party, but a severe cold detained her in town. Lady Chilworth has great influence with Aunt Maria, and persuaded her to let me go to Yorkshire without her; I was to take part in some theatricals, and my place could not be supplied at the last moment. It was the opportunity for which we had been waiting, and we decided not to let it slip. Lord Lukestan's plans were complete. He showed me a special license, and he said Parker knew a village where we could be married, and that all the necessary steps had been taken. We left Chilworth on the morning of the 23rd of January. I had previously wired home that the heavy snow would delay my return twenty-four hours. Lady Chilworth was going abroad almost immediately, and as I write all my aunt's letters I was not afraid of the deception being discovered. We left the train at Garstang, where Parker was waiting with a hired trap, and we drove to this church. There was no one about. The clergyman was

waiting for us at the chancel step. He began the service at once. Parker gave me away, and we afterwards signed our names in the vestry. We drove back to the station and caught the next train to Doncaster. I returned to town the following day."

"Was there any conversation between Mr. Martyn and yourselves?"

"None; he did not speak to either of us. Lord Lukestan put the fee on the vestry table. It was a ten-pound note, and he remarked afterwards that the vicar might have wished us luck. There was no luck for us, I suppose," she concluded bitterly.

I was a good deal puzzled by this sudden check. However, I said what I could to comfort her, and suggested that the clerk could be produced as a witness.

"There was no clerk," she replied, "there was no one in the church but the clergyman, Parker, and ourselves."

From Berkeley Square I hurried to the Temple, found Roskill, and decided with him that I should go up to Slumber-le-Wold, see Martyn, and examine the register.

I found the vicar at home, and acquainted him with my errand. He received me civilly, and in reply to my questions informed me that I was quite at liberty to inspect the register, but it was not possible that I could find any entry of the marriage.

"Since I received your letter," he said, "I have referred to my diary, and will gladly give you all the information in my power. I find that on the 20th of January I received intimation of an intended wedding. The note, which was brought by a man who looked like a superior servant, had neither address nor date, and was signed Arthur Evelyn Lukestan. I am quite ignorant of the various titles of our aristocracy, and was not aware of the existence of such a person as Lord Lukestan. I was informed the marriage would be by license, and that, owing to certain circumstances, which could be explained to me, if needful, before the ceremony, it was to be of a strictly private character. I ascertained that the contracting parties were of age, and fixed the time for one o'clock on the 23rd. Early that morning I was called to the sick bed of a distant parishioner. As I had been advised that the wedding was to be as private as possible, I did not

inform the clerk that his services would be required. I intended to do so on my return from Bretwell. Unfortunately I met with an accident. My horse set its foot on a stone, stumbled, and threw me heavily. I lay for some time unconscious, and when I came to myself I found my ankle so severely sprained that I was unable to move. The road is a lonely one, and it was at least two hours before I could obtain assistance. I reached home at 3 o'clock, and immediately sent to the church. There was no one there. I afterwards ascertained that a lady and two men, strangers, had passed through the village in the direction of the church, and had returned after the lapse of half an hour. I waited in daily expectation of hearing of or from them, but no news came, and as I did not know Lord, or as I thought, Mr. Lukestan's address, I was unable to communicate with him. I ought to mention that an open envelope containing a ten-pound note was found on the vestry table. I kept it for three months, anticipating some explanation from the donor, then, as none came, I concluded the money was intended for an offering, and devoted it to the relief of the poor."

I inquired if it were possible that in his absence any other clergyman could have been pressed into the service.

"Quite impossible," he replied. "If any priest could be found willing to commit such a breach of etiquette, he would certainly have informed me of it afterwards; and, in any case, the clerk would have been called."

I said I should like to see the register, and Mr. Martyn led the way to the church.

It stood, as Miss Ardilaun had said, on an eminence at some distance from the village, and was separated from the vicarage by the entire length of the garden and churchyard.

"Is this door always open?" I inquired, as we entered the south porch.

"Between matins and evensong the church is open for private prayer, though," with a sigh, "my parishioners do not often avail themselves of the privilege."

We went up to the vestry. It was furnished with a table, two chairs, a hanging cupboard, and a massive, iron-bound chest of black oak. The vicar took a bunch of keys from his pocket, selected one of peculiar shape, unlocked the chest, and produced the register.

"We have not many marriages here," he said. "I have only solemnized two in the last six months. The last was in April."

He turned to the place. There were two entries at the top of the page. The final date on the preceding leaf was for the 30th of December.

I made a minute examination of the pages. Then I glanced keenly at my companion.

"Mr. Martyn," I said, "these two leaves are stuck together."

"Impossible!" he answered.

"Feel them," I rejoined. "This page is thicker than the rest, and the edges are not quite even at the bottom."

He scrutinized the book, testing the substance of the paper between his thumb and forefinger.

"You are quite right," he said, quietly; "though I should never have noticed it. Have you a knife?"

I opened my penknife and very carefully inserted the thinnest blade.

How the leaves had been secured, it was impossible to say. There was not the slightest trace of mucilage on the edges of the paper, and the incision once made, they parted easily.

At the top of the left-hand page was the entry of a marriage between Arthur Evelyn Lukestan, bachelor, and Pamela Mary Ardilaun, spinster. The witness was William John Parker.

"My God!"

The exclamation came from the vicar. His eyes were fixed on the register, and his face was white to the very lips.

"What is it?" I asked, in surprise.

He pointed speechlessly to the fourth signature. It was written in a firm, very uncommon hand, "Cyprian George Martyn."

"That is not your name, Mr. Martyn?"

He faced me suddenly.

"It is not," he answered. "It is that of my brother Cyprian, who died last October."

I confess I felt horribly taken aback. Miss Ardilaun's admission that she had been acquainted with the younger Martyn, taken in connection with the other peculiar circum-

stances attending her marriage, gave rise in my mind to a most uncomfortable suspicion.

I regarded my client with the sincerest admiration and sympathy. I was anxious to prove the validity of her claims and the truth of her statements, but I could not blind myself to the fact of her position being desperate, and I knew that a desperate woman is frequently unscrupulous.

For a few seconds we remained silent, each, I believe, suspecting the other's complicity in what was evidently a deep-laid plot. Then I pulled myself together.

"You say that is your brother's name, Mr. Martyn; is it also his handwriting?"

"It is like it, very like it, but it can only be a forgery, since, as I told you, my brother is dead."

I examined the entry carefully.

"The particulars are filled in by the same hand, and it would not, I imagine, be an easy one to imitate. Had you seen this signature during your brother's lifetime, should you have had any doubts as to its being genuine?"

"If he were living, none."

"I should like to compare it with an authenticated specimen of his writing, if you have one by you. I need not apologize for the trouble I am giving you, since you will understand that this is, to my client, a matter of life and death, or rather of what is more important than either to a woman, of honor."

"I understand that, and you will have any assistance I can render, but——"

He broke off abruptly, and proceeded to re-lock the chest.

"We will carry the register up to the house. I have some of my brother's letters there, which will serve your purpose."

"Is the register usually kept here?"

"Always."

"And the key, have you more than one? I see it is of a very uncommon pattern."

"So far as I know, there has never been a duplicate."

"And it has not, to your knowledge, left your possession?"

"I am sure it has not. I carry it constantly about my person."

"Had you those keys with you on the 23d of January?"

"Yes, I am certain of it."

"How, then, was it possible for any one to get at the register?"

"I cannot tell. It would appear impossible, were it not for that extraordinary entry."

"It would be impossible to tamper with that lock," I said, pointing to the coffer.

"I should have thought so."

We retraced our steps, the vicar carrying the register, which he placed on the table in his study. He then produced a bundle of letters, selected two or three, which he glanced through and handed to me. We compared the signatures with that in the register. They were identical. If a forgery, it was the work of an expert. No amateur could have counterfeited so perfectly those singular characters.

"Your brother's handwriting bears very little resemblance to yours," I remarked. "Were you much alike in person?"

"There was a family likeness, not, I think, very strong; but you can judge for yourself. This is my brother's photograph."

He pointed to a massive silver frame which occupied the centre of the mantel-piece. I went over and studied the portrait. It was a large, three-quarter platina-type of a tall, handsome man, apparently several years younger than the vicar of Slumber-le-Wold. There was, as he had said, a family likeness between the two faces, but it was not remarkable, and no one could for a moment have mistaken one for the other.

I returned to town, sorely perplexed, drove straight to the Temple, where I had wired, requesting Roskill, and, if possible, Miss Ardilaun, to wait for me, and told my story.

Charley was furious. He made some very intemperate and highly absurd charges against the clergy in general, and Mr. Martyn in particular, and declared himself as firmly convinced of Lady Lukestan's good faith as he was of his own.

I ventured to suggest that in this case his convictions were of less moment than those of the judge and jury, and I doubted if any judge would share the opinion he had so confidently expressed. For my part, I could see only three possible solutions of the mystery. (1) That Martyn, who was the only person having access to the register, had, for

some private motive, tried to suppress the fact of the marriage, in which case the history of his accident and absence on the 23d of January was an invention, and could easily be disproved ; (2) that Lord Lukestan, finding the vicar absent, had obtained the services either of another clergyman or some one personating the same, and had gone through the marriage ceremony, by way of satisfying Miss Ardilaun's scruples ; (3) That the story of the marriage was an entire fabrication, the last resource of a despairing woman, in which case it was impossible to account for the entry in the register.

At this juncture Lady Lukestan was announced. She was dressed in deep, but not widow's, mourning, which became her admirably. She was certainly a very beautiful woman, and, looking into her clear blue eyes, it seemed impossible to doubt her integrity.

I questioned her closely as to her previous statements, but she never swerved a hair's breadth from her original story.

I had brought with me a photograph of Mr. Lucian Martyn, and one of his brothers. She looked at the former, and failed to recognize it, though she thought there was something familiar in the expression. I then handed her the portrait of Cyprian Martyn. She gave an involuntary shudder.

"That is the man who married us," she said, and laid the photograph, face downwards, on the table.

"Are you quite sure," I urged, "that you are not making a mistake ? The first portrait is that of the present vicar of Slumber-le-Wold, the other that of his brother, who, as you know, is dead."

I shall never forget her expression at that moment, the mingled horror and repulsion written on her colorless face.

"Then it *was* he !" she cried. "I knew it. My God ! how horrible !"

She made an uncertain step forward, stretching out both hands toward Roskill, with the sudden uncontrollable impulse of blind terror, and slid helplessly to the ground in a dead faint.

I felt certain then of what I had suspected from the beginning, viz., that Miss Ardilaun knew more of the mystery than she had chosen to confess, and I considered she was treating us unfairly, for a lawyer cannot, any more than a physician,

advise on 'an incomplete diagnosis. She had voluntarily placed herself in our hands, and she ought to have taken us unreservedly into her confidence.

I found an opportunity of expressing these sentiments to Roskill before he escorted her home, and advised him to try to get at the truth. She might speak freely to him. I was sure she had not done so to me.

The more I thought over the bearings of the case, the more I questioned the expediency of taking it into court. The whole weight of evidence told against the plaintiff. She could not produce a single witness to corroborate her story.

That Lukestan intended to marry her there was no reasonable doubt; but the sole proof of the ceremony having taken place was an entry in the parish register which was manifestly a forgery.

The only witness whose evidence would have carried any weight, the valet Parker, was dead. It was the bare word of a woman, and a woman in desperate straits, against the reason and common sense of the whole world.

In my opinion, Miss Ardilaun's wisest course would be to keep quiet. Lady Catermaran was now lying in a state of semi-unconsciousness, and her decease could only be a question of days. Presumably she would have made some provision for her niece, and at her demise Miss Ardilaun would be her own mistress. She might retire somewhere abroad, and her unhappy story need never be given to the world.

But to drag the case into court seemed to be absolutely courting publicity and shame. She might consider herself Lukestan's wife, but, in the eyes of the law and of society, she was simply his mistress, and her child would be declared illegitimate.

And then there remained the question, had she really believed herself legally married, or was her story only a last desperate expedient to avert the consequences of a fatal error.

The doubts in Miss Ardilaun's sincerity, which her presence invariably tended to dispel, had an awkward way of returning very forcibly when the magnetism of her personal influence was removed.

Late in the afternoon Roskill returned. I saw at once that he had something to tell me. He threw his hat and

gloves on the table, and began to pace restlessly up and down the room.

"It is the most extraordinary case that ever has or will be heard," he said.

"She has told you everything?"

"Yes."

"Did the marriage ever take place, then?"

He looked at me murderously.

"You heard her say so; that ought to be proof enough for you."

It wasn't, but I did not attempt to argue the point. I inquired who had performed the ceremony.

"The man whose name you saw in the register, Cyprian Martyn."

"But he's been dead for the last nine months," I objected. "How could he reappear in the flesh to solemnize a marriage?"

"I don't know," he answered, "how the devil works, or by what laws he is bound. There are some things which cannot be explained. That brute—well, the man is dead, and I won't abuse him, though, living and dead, he's behaved like a brute—got acquainted with Pam—Miss Ardilaun, fell in love with her, and wanted to marry her. She refused him, whereupon he conducted himself in a manner for which his only excuse could be that he was insane at the time. He told her that she had ruined him body and soul, that he meant to have his revenge, and if ever she married, he should marry her, if not himself, then to another man. Then he went back to his parish, somewhere in Dorsetshire, and committed suicide."

"Well," I said, "what has that to do with the Lukestan marriage?"

"Everything—the man kept his word. He did marry her to Lukestan. The poor girl had a secret terror all the time that he had done so, but the thing seemed so incredible that she fought it down and hoped against hope, until it was impossible to doubt any longer."

I sat and stared at him blankly. He was absolutely serious.

"Do you really expect me to believe," I said at last, "that a man who has been dead for nine months could rise from

his grave, assume bodily form and material clothing, go through a form of prayer, extract a register from a locked chest, make that entry, and disappear again into the limbo of the unknown?"

"I don't expect anything. I tell you facts."

"Good heavens, Charley, you must be mad! You can't believe such a monstrous story!"

"I believe it entirely. It is the only rational explanation of that entry."

"Rational!" I echoed, contemptuously.

"Yes, rational; for what do we know of the powers and limitations of what we are pleased to call spirits? Nothing. On the other hand, is it reasonable to suppose that three people could obtain access, without a key and without damaging the lock, to a secured chest, abstract the register, the whereabouts of which they were entirely ignorant, and make an entry in the name and handwriting of a dead man—a piece of penmanship, moreover, unrivalled in the annals of forgery? Surely the latter theory is as great a strain on your credulity as the former."

"Take it into court and see what they say to it there?"

"I intend to do so," he answered, quietly.

"No solicitor will undertake the case."

"If you mean that you won't, I shall find some one who will, though I would much rather receive instructions from you than from a stranger."

Then I gave tongue. For two hours I used every argument in my power. I stormed, I persuaded; I believe I threatened, but he remained quite unmoved.

"It isn't the least use, Jack," he said, when at last I stopped, exhausted. "Legally and morally Pamela is Lukestan's widow, and I mean to fight to the last gasp for her rights. If we succeed, so much the better for her and her child. If we fail, well, we shall have done our best to vindicate truth and justice. In either case, I may as well tell you that I intend to make her my wife. Her aunt is not expected to live through the night. She will be alone in the world then, and I shall marry her as soon as I decently can. I believe she has cared for me from the first," he added, softly, with the credulity of a man who loves.

I doubted it, but what was the use of saying so. Roskill's

will has all through our joint lives dominated that of his weaker brother, and when a few days later I heard from Miss Ardilaun's lips the particulars of her extraordinary story, I succumbed to that personal influence which would subdue any man save an unprejudiced judge.

The long and short of it was that Roskill had his way, and in process of time the case of "Lukestan *vs.* Lukestan and others," came on for hearing. Miss Ardilaun's appearance created a profound sensation in court. She told her story simply and directly, and the most severe cross-examination failed to shake her in the smallest detail.

The fact of Lukestan's having taken out a special license, together with his letters (produced), proved he had desired to be, and believed he was, legally married. The evidence of the station-master at Garstang, of the innkeeper from whom the trap was hired, of the villagers who saw the party pass through Slumber-le-Wold, all confirmed their progress to the very door of the church, but there stretched a gulf which no human witness could bridge.

The personality of the officiating priest, the authorship of the entry in the register, alike remained an inexplicable mystery.

It was admitted on all hands that Roskill's speech was a model of forensic rhetoric. He surpassed the utmost expectations of those who had prophesied for him a brilliant future, and placed himself at once in the front rank of the Junior Bar. But no argument, however powerful, could have convinced a dozen hard-headed, practical Englishmen of the possible existence of ghosts. They were called upon to decide whether Cyprian Martyn, being dead, had resumed his fleshly habit to solemnize a marriage which consigned the woman who had rejected him to shame and obloquy, or whether, on the other hand, Pamela Ardilaun had, with the late Lord Lukestan and Parker, the valet, fraudulently obtained access to the parish register and therein forged the entry of a fictitious marriage—and the twelve good men and true unhesitatingly decided against the ghost.

Judgment was given for the defendant, with costs, and Pamela Ardilaun left the court a ruined woman. The slender fortune left her by her aunt was more than swallowed up by the expenses of the trial. Her fair fame was blasted, she

was branded before the world as an impostor and an adventuress. Verily, if her story were true, Cyprian Martyn had taken a complete revenge.

Yet the woman was not left utterly desolate. Through all stress of weather Roskill's love stood firm. He absolutely refused to be dismissed. He assumed the management of her affairs, provided her with a home, and procured the first medical advice when, broken down with anxiety and despair, her life hung trembling in the balance. He followed to the grave the hapless infant, who lived just long enough to receive its father's baptismal names of Arthur Evelyn, and, finally, in spite of her repeated refusals to burden him with her wretched life, made her his wife.

A year after Lukestan's tragic death the two were married before the Registrar. Nothing would have induced either to risk a repetition of the horrors of that other wedding, and as the law takes no cognizance of ghosts, Cyprian Martyn's uneasy spirit was unable to interfere in the civil ceremony which made Miss Ardilaun Charley Roskill's wife.

